

UNFORGETTABLE

"Life was
PASSION
and **POETRY**

Naushad Ali



He gave singing sensations Suraiya and Lata Mangeshkar their first break in Hindi films. He was also the first to introduce the genre of Indian classical music in films and emphasize on background score... CINE BLITZ presents inimitable musical genius Naushad Ali.

The awards and accolades have been many. Yet Naushad Ali remains simple and humble to a fault. And totally immersed in the world of music. His eyes, surrounded by a network of lines, sparkle as he speaks of his passion... "Music is my excitement, my pleasure, my ecstasy," he smiles. "I was born in Lucknow and my chief delight was music. As a child I detested academics. I would spend hours at a cinema in our vicinity listening to the orchestra. This continued daily and I would end up returning home late at night. My father didn't like this and would often thrash me. Yet my passion continued to grow..."



With his friends Dev Anand and Suraiya. It was Naushad who gave her a break in films as a singer.

"I formed a theatre club along with my close friends. I was entrusted with the job of providing music for our productions. We went on to form another club called Windsor Music Entertainers which was mainly a teaching-cum-performing institution. This was followed by the setting up of the Indian Star Theatrical Company, which produced old Indian dramas. Yet I wanted to form my own group in which I could experiment with tunes. I went ahead and put together an orchestra with musicians I knew from childhood. We visited Delhi, Moradabad, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Mt. Abu and Viramgam on the Saurashtra border with our orchestra. But at Viramgam, nobody turned up at our show and we went bankrupt. I had to sell our musical instruments and even the curtains and drapes – but still couldn't raise the passage money."

Finding a foothold in this industry was no doubt daunting for Naushad. He moved to Bombay in the late 1930s to try his luck as a musician. The struggle was severe and he saw days of acute deprivation. He even spent nights on the footpath before he bagged work as a pianist in composer Mushtaq Hussain's orchestra. Naushad then joined music director Khemchand Prakash (whom he considers his teacher) as his assistant. *Prem Nagar* (1940) was his first independent break but he first got noticed with *Sharda* (1942) in which 13-year-old Suraiya did the playback for heroine Mehtab. It was *Battan* (1944) which catapulted Naushad right to the top, enabling him to charge Rs.25,000 a film. 'Ankhiyaan milake' and 'Sawan ke badalon' became the most popular songs of the day.

"Having achieved success I was invited by A.R. Kardar to score music for his films," Naushad reveals. "The salary was Rs.500 a month. My fortuitous teaming with Kardar created hits like *Shahjahan* (1946), *Dard* (1947), *Dillagi* (1949) and *Dulari* (1949)."

For Naushad it has been a long and illustrious career working with the musical greats of the industry... "I was honoured to work with singers like Lata Mangeshkar, Mohammad Rafi, Suraiya, Shamshad Begum, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and D.V. Paluskar. I didn't 'make' their careers; I merely charted the direction. I have always tried to bring Indian classical music to the fore and the dedicated singers with whom I worked did full justice to my songs."

The maestro believes that what's missing in film music today is "the poetic element, the shairi which the music of yesteryears had in abundance. Now we are merely aping the West blindly. Our music is not rooted and so it lacks charm and fades out after some time. Where have all our Indian musical instruments gone – the sarangi, the tanpura, the flute? Today our music composers create music on the synthesizer and the entire song is recorded overnight.



He introduced many of his friends to the industry. Seen here with close friends and associates at his birthday celebration.



He saw days of acute deprivation and spent nights on the footpath during his struggle period.

Nowadays a music composer has to compose the tune first and then the words are written. He can go ahead with the music only if the actors or the directors give the nod. It's like ordering for the coffin first and then asking for the corpse to be fit in!

"When Asif saab decided to make *Mughal-e-Azam* I told him to change the situation slightly because by then *Anarkali* had been released. Viewers wouldn't like seeing the same subject once again, I told him. However Asif saab was determined to retain the same subject. I accepted the challenge and encouraged Shakeel Badayuni to come up with superb lyrics. We sat up all night ignorant of hunger and the outcome at 6.30 a.m. was the song 'Pyar kiya to darna kya...'"

"You will be surprised to know that I didn't charge a single rupee for the film *Baiju Bawara* even though it became a silver jubilee hit. I remember Mehboob saab mortgaging everything to make *Mother India*. Do you think they were money-crazy? Money was the last thing on their mind; they just wanted to create their best. Today there's a lack of dedication and discipline everywhere. Fact is we don't have good scripts anymore. Where will you find such stalwarts who made films on strong subjects?" he exclaims.

Like a true artiste, Naushad reveals that he is still not satisfied with his work. "Even today when I hear my music, I tend to find flaws." The urge to take his art further still burns strongly... "I want to establish an academy for budding singers. Although it has been three years since I approached the state government for a land allotment for the academy, the project has still not seen the light of day. But I am an optimist and I hope that my dream will be fulfilled. On this note I would like to end with a shairi...."

"Pyas meri jo bujh gayi hoti, Zindagi phir na zindagi hoti." (Had my thirst been quenched, my life wouldn't have been the same)



Sushmita Biswas